

DEPARTMENT OF ALCOHOL AND DRUG PROGRAMS

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January 4, 2008

TO: Interested Parties

The holiday season is a time to reflect on the past year and look forward to a new year filled with promise and opportunity. It is a time to appreciate family and friends, and a time to celebrate.

For too many people these celebrations will end in tragedy because of drinking and driving. Last year over the Christmas and New Year holidays the California Highway Patrol arrested 2,832 people for driving-while-under-the-influence. In the same time period 66 people were killed and over 75 percent of them were not wearing seat belts.

While we do not have 2008 statistics available at this time, historically over one-third of arrests made during the holiday season were the result of some sort of impaired driving.

Underage drinking is a grave issue in California that demands the serious attention and effective action of families, communities, local and state governments. It is a major public health and safety concern statewide and nationally. The Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs (ADP) remains committed to investing in the reduction and prevention of underage drinking and the consequences it produces.

Data tells us that alcohol is the most commonly used drug among California's youth. Nationally, by the time a young person finishes the eighth grade, more than half will have tried alcohol. Only 31 percent of parents of 15-16 year olds believe their child had a drink in the past year, compared to the 60 percent of teens in that age group who reported drinking. We also know that the alcohol industry makes an estimated \$22.5 billion due to underage drinkers, accounting for 17.5 percent of all alcohol sales in the United States.

There are key, abiding, principles that guide ADP in its efforts to address this issue:

- It is inappropriate and unacceptable for the alcohol industry to market its products in ways that appeal to youth.
- The combination of stimulants with alcohol is dangerous. A study at the Wake Forrest University School of Medicine shows that college students who drink energy drinks with alcohol are at dramatically higher risk of injury and other alcohol-related consequences than those who drink alcohol without energy drinks.



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- Underage drinking is not just a youth issue. It is a community issue that includes the sale or provision of alcohol to minors, enforcement of existing laws, and engaging youth in shifting norms.

ADP has worked in partnership with the counties, the field, and other State systems to mitigate this critical issue. Past and current efforts include:

- The Governor's Prevention Advisory Council (GPAC) created and distributed a parents' guide for underage drinking and high-rate users. This guide is now being adopted and distributed in other States. In 2007, GPAC organized 29 Town Hall Meetings (THMs) statewide. Thirty-nine THMs will begin in March 2008. The purpose of these meetings is to gather citizens and local decision-makers to discuss and deal with underage drinking problems.
- ADP awarded State Incentive Grants to 13 counties for programs specifically designed to reduce binge drinking among teens and young adults.
- ADP collaborates with other State departments such as the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, Office of Traffic Safety, and the Department of Transportation on special projects and campaigns that focus on driving-while-under-the-influence and underage drinking.
- ADP provides "no-cost" technical assistance and training for communities to study this issue and its impact on individuals, families and communities, and then presents it before local and State policy makers.
- The California Friday Night Live Partnership supports the local Friday Night Live programs to address the prevention of underage drinking (see enclosure for highlights).
- Local Friday Night Live programs across the State work closely with the California Highway Patrol and the Office of Traffic Safety to help young people buckle-up, slow down, prevent underage drinking and driving-while-under-the-influence. Youth are helping pave the way to safer roadways by intervening when they see a potentially dangerous situation.
- Knowing that "Alcopops" are the newest trend in underage drinking, ADP generated a report to inform public policy concerning this alcoholic beverage. Friday Night Live youth successfully petitioned the State Board of Equalization to classify Alcopops as distilled spirits.
- ADP has been an active partner in the adoption of Tracking Responsibility for Alcohol Connected Emergencies, a policy that helps identify the source of alcohol when there is a serious incident with underage youth and alcohol.

As ADP's Director, I am committed to continuing ADP's efforts to address and arrest these trends that threaten the safety and well-being of our youth, their families and communities.

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I strongly encourage you to join us in partnering with your local organizations, communities and ADP to explore opportunities for taking effective action in reducing the personal, social, and health problems that result from underage drinking.

Together we can make a difference – buckle-up, slow down, and help prevent drinking and driving.

Sincerely,

RENÉE ZITO, LMSW, CASAC
Director

Enclosure (1)